

Dear Members of the Human Services Committee of Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Jen and I am a social worker and student in New Haven, CT. I am also part of the Semilla Collective, a grassroots organization fighting alongside immigrants and working families in Connecticut.

I stand in support of SB284: AN ACT INCREASING THE AGE FROM EIGHT TO EIGHTEEN YEARS FOR AN INCOME-ELIGIBLE PERSON TO OBTAIN MEDICAL ASSISTANCE REGARDLESS OF IMMIGRATION STATUS. Expanding access to HUSKY up to age 18 regardless of immigration status is an important step in making sure our immigrant community has access to the healthcare we all need and deserve. But our work doesn't end with expanding access up to age 18; we need to open access to HUSKY and healthcare to all immigrants of any age, including parents and adults.

Last year, I interned at a school in person during peak COVID-19 outbreak. At the same time, my husband—an immigrant and US resident for less than five years—was unemployed but not eligible for Husky Health, despite us meeting income requirements. It was during this time that I developed anxiety disorder, for which I had to take medication and seek therapeutic treatment for over a year. The stress of possibly bringing home COVID-19 to my uninsured husband was a tremendous burden, one that many of my colleagues didn't understand. I would have trouble falling asleep at night because of my anxiety of worrying if I would bring COVID home to my husband. I don't wish this upon anyone, and this experience was truly eye opening to the issue of health inequity within this state. We can do better for our immigrant community.

I also worked with immigrant youth who, because of their status, were ineligible for outpatient therapy. For example, a teenager who struggled with depression and anxiety wasn't able to go to weekly therapy as treatment because of their status. I know youth mental health is a top priority for legislators this year. Here is one way you can make a difference for many students, who need extra support with their mental health and need to see a therapist. Often, school-based health centers and school social workers don't cover such services, and children need access to specialists and mental health services. I want to ask though, what happens when a child ages out of the HUSKY health program? Also, how will children take care of their mental health if their parents cannot also seek the same services? Or if they feel bad for asking to go to a therapist or doctor, because their parent doesn't have the same access? Why are we placing this burden upon the immigrant community?

People get sick, and people struggle with mental health. None of this is surprising, yet some of us continue to be punished because of where we came from. Health care and mental health service providers continue to be frustrated and burnt out as well, as we can't do our jobs fully when some of our clients don't have the same access to critical services. I urge you, to please increase the age to 18, and to adults next year as well.

I support S.B. 284 and I ask the committee to support and pass this legislation. Looking forward, I ask the committee to work towards opening access to all community members in CT regardless of age or status. You have the power to help end a major health inequity, please exercise that for the health of our communities.

Thank you for your time,

Jennifer Orlando